DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 741 HE 014 429

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TITLE University Student Knowledge of the Effects of Alcohol.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
SPONS AGENCY Maryland Univ., College Park. Health Center.
REPORT NO UM-CC-RR-8-80
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 10p.; For related document see HE 014 409.
AVAILABLE FROM University of Maryland, Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Counseling Center, College Park, MD 20742 ($1.50).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alcoholic Beverages; Alcoholism; *College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Drinking; Higher Education; *Knowledge Level; School Surveys; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *University of Maryland College Park

ABSTRACT

In a study of alcohol knowledge among college students, 180 students completed a 24-item questionnaire. Fifty-four percent of the respondents were male and 46 percent were female; 56 percent were freshmen or sophomores, 44 percent were juniors or seniors; 51 percent were commuters and 49 percent lived on campus. Seventy-one percent of the respondents considered themselves to be informed as to the effects of alcohol on their bodies and behaviors, 13 percent felt they did not, and 16 percent were uncertain. A majority of students accurately responded to 9 of the 20 items dealing with alcohol knowledge; most of those questions dealt with popular myths or "folklore" about alcohol use. Students appeared to be less informed about items that required more specific knowledge. Although 71 percent of the respondents considered themselves to be informed, there were only four items on which more than 66 percent of the students replied with accuracy. Chi square analysis indicated that relationships existed between the sex of the respondents and the responses to five of the items. These items included among others: (1) taking a cold shower can help sober you up; (2) the alcohol content of one 12-ounce beer equals 1 1/2 ounces of hard liquor; (3) the proof of liquor is twice the percentage of alcohol content. The consistent pattern found in these items was that women were more likely to respond that they did not know, but men more often gave definitive true/false responses that were sometimes accurate and sometimes not. (Author/LB)

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ED208741

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UNIVERSITY STUDENT KNOWLEDGE OF THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Lydia Y. Minatoya, William E. Sedlacek, Bruce E. Heckman and Margaret W. Bridwell

Research Report # 8-80

HE014429

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

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SUMMARY

One hundred eighty students (77% return rate) completed a 24-item questionnaire on alcohol knowledge. Fifty-four percent of the respondents were males and 46% were females; 56% were freshmen or sophomores, and 44% were juniors or seniors. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were commuters and 49% lived on campus. Seventy-one percent of the respondents considered themselves to be informed as to the effects of alcohol on their bodies and behaviors, 13% felt they did not know about the effects of alcohol, and 16% were uncertain as to whether or not they were informed about the effects of alcohol.

A majority of students accurately responded to 9 of the 20 items which dealt with alcohol knowledge. Most of these items dealt with what might be termed popular myths or folklore about alcohol use. Students appeared to be less informed about items which required more specific knowledge. Although 71% of the respondents considered themselves to be informed about alcohol, there were only four items on which more than 66% of the respondents replied with accuracy. Chi square analyses indicated that relationships existed between the sex of the respondents and the responses to five of the items. These items included: (a) taking a cold shower can help you sober up; (b) the alcohol content of one 12 ounce beer equals 1-1/2 ounces of hard liquor; (c) the proof of liquor is twice the percentage of alcohol content; (d) drinks mixed with water will produce intoxication sooner than drinks mixed with a carbonated beverage; and (e) a 12 ounce beer and one ounce of 100 proof whiskey contain the same amount of alcohol. The consistent pattern found in these items was that women were more likely to respond that they did not know, whereas men more often gave definitive true/false responses which were sometimes acccurate and sometimes inaccurate.

In a survey of drug use among incoming freshmen, Minatoya and Sedlacek (1979) found that while 55% of students legally were eligible to drink, over 95% consumed alcoholic beverages. Additionally, 45% reported that they had begun drinking with friends before the age of fifteen, and 80% had begun drinking before the age of sixteen. The most frequently cited reason for drinking alcoholic beverages was "to get drunk."

Heckman (1980) surveyed students utilizing evening and weekend services of the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) Health Center and found a significantly greater relationship between seeking treatment for injuries and drinking than seeking treatment for illness and drinking. Thirty one percent of the students seeking treatment for injuries had been drinking in the three hours prior to seeking treatment. Only 9% of the students seeking treatment for illness reported having had alcoholic beverages during the three hours prior to seeking treatment.

Apparently, a large proportion of college students drink. A question raised is: are these students drinkers educated about the effects of alcohol? Strange and Schmidt (1979) found that college students seem to have limited knowledge about the physical and legal aspects of alcohol consumption. For example, they found students to be largely unaware of the legal definition of drinking while intoxicated, and to possess rather naive conceptions about panaceas for quickly "sobering up." Hill and Bugen (1979) found university students were able to answer only half the questions on a twelve-item alcohol information test correctly. Males tended to score higher than females. The kind of questions most frequently answered incorrectly dealt with factual information on alcohol content of liquor, alcohol oxidation rate, methods of sobering up, drugs dangerous in combination with alcohol, and the legal definition of intoxication. Similarly, the Education Commission of the States' National Assessment of Educational Progress (1978) surveyed seventeen year old students and found that 15% did not believe that alcohol

affects driving ability after one drink, and 12% did not believe alcohol was physically addictive.

In response to such findings, the UMCP Health Center became interested in initiating a systematic program to sensitize its staff and the campus to issues concerning responsible drinking and the early detection and prevention of alcohol abuse.

The research unit of the UMCP Counseling Center had conducted studies of campus needs, attitudes and issues, including studies on alcohol use. To enhance mutual interest in researching alcohol knowledge and to contend with limited resources such as time and funding, a collaborative research effort was conceived, in which the Counseling Center conducted the survey of student knowledge and the Health Center funded the payment of a trained undergraduate phone survey staff. Through this collaboration, the survey was completed and a report of the findings written within two weeks of the initial contact.

Four undergraduates were trained in phone survey methods. A random sample of 180 students was administered a 24 item survey by phone. The survey requested "true", "false", or "don't know" responses. The sample was 54% male and 46% female and represented a 77% response rate. Fifty percent of the students were freshmen or sophomores and 44% were juniors or seniors. The results were analyzed descriptively by frequency and percentages, and chi squares were conducted by sex of respondents.

Results

Seventy percent of the respondents considered themselves to be informed about the affects of alcohol on their bodies and behavior, 13% felt they did not know about the effects of alcohol, and 16% were uncertain as to whether or not they were informed drinkers.

As indicated in Table 1, a majority of students accurately responded to 9 of

the 20 items dealing with alcohol knowledge. Most of these items dealt with what might be described as popular myths about alcohol usage.

Students appeared to be less knowledgeable about items which required more specificity of knowledge, as can be seen in Table 2. While 71% of the respondents considered themselves to be informed drinkers, there were only four items to which more than 2/3 of the respondents replied with accuracy.

Chi square analysis indicated that a relationship existed between the sex of the respondents and the reponses to five of the items. These items included: (a) taking a cold shower can help you sober up; (b) the alcohol content of one 12oz. beer equal 1½ oz. of hard liquor; (c) the proof of liquor is twice the percentage of alcohol content; (d) drinks with liquor mixed with water will produce intoxication sooner than drinks mixed with a carbonated beverage; and (e) a 12 oz. can of beer and one ounce of 100 proof whiskey contain the same amount of alcohol. Examination of these responses to items revealed that more men than women correctly identified that a cold shower does not hasten sobriety, that a 12 ounce can of beer and one ounce of 100 proof whiskey contain the same amount of alcohol, and that the proof of liquor is twice the percentage of alcohol content. However, more men than women incorrectly equated the alcohol content of a 12 ounce beer with 1½ ounces of liquor, and incorrectly believed that drinks mixed with water produce intoxication faster than drinks mixed with carbonated beverages. The consistent pattern found in all the items related significantly to sex was that women were more likely to respond that they did not know, whereas men more often gave definite true/false responses which sometimes were accurate and sometimes inaccurate.

Discussion

While over 3/4 of the students sampled felt that they were knowledgeable about the effects of alcohol on their bodies and behaviors, the results suggest

that their understanding of alcohol and its effects is often inaccurate or incomplete. For example, almost one-third of the students believed folklore such as that drinking coffee can help one sober up, or that people get more friendly as they become more intoxicated. More than half were or misinformed or uncertain as to whether drinking alcohol helps to increase body temporature in cold weather. Responses to 5 items were found to be significantly related to the sex of the respondent. On all five of these items it appeared that women were more apt to respond that they did not know whether a statement was accurate or not, while men gave definitive true or false responses which were sometimes accurate and sometimes not. Perhaps to University students drinking and knowledge about alcohol is associated with a mystique of masculinity. To admit uncertainly about the properties of alcohol or its effects seems to be more difficult for males than for females. Thus, the Chi square analyses may be reflecting a type of "my opinion, right or wrong" swagger. Examination of whether social pressures and sex role sterotyping pressures affect the attitudes and behavior of males towards drinking would be an interesting area for subsequent research. This survey was used as a needs assessment for planning subsequent interventions. The collaboration between two campus agencies enabled the assessment to be done quickly, and at a minimal cost. Additionally, of the 180 students surveyed, 96 students expressed interest in receiving the answers to the items and a written summary of the findings. Hence the survey itself may be viewed as a means of increasing the receptivity of students toward obtaining information about the effects of alcohol use.

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TABLE 1

Items to Which a Majority of the Students Responded Correctly

Item	Correct Answer*	% Correct	% Incorrect	% Uncertain	Tota
1. Drinking coffee can help you sober up.	F	56	32	12	100%
2. Taking a cold shower can help you sober up.	F	62	17	21	100%
3. 50% of all highway accidents are alcohol related.	T	64	9	27	100%
4. If you eat while drinking, you can't get drunk.	F	89	7	4	100%
5. Alcohol is a drug.	T	83	11	6	100%
6. Alcohol is a stimulant.	F	66	20	14	100%
7. A person won't become an alcoholic drinking only beer.	F	85	7	8	100%
8. People become more friendly or sociable as they become more intoxicated.	F	54	33	13	100%
9. Women are not as susceptible to developing problems with alcohol as men are.	F	87	3	10	100%

* T = true, F = false;

TABLE 2

Items to Which a Majority of the Students Responded Incorrectly

Item	Correct Answer*	% Correct	% Incorrect	% Uncertain	Total
1. The alcohol content of one 12 oz. beer equals 4-5 oz. of table wine.	T	41	14	45	100%
2. The alcohol content of one 12oz. beer equals 1½ oz. of hard liquor.	T	34	21	45	100%
3. The proof of liquor is twice the percentage of alcohol content.	T	35	17	48	100%
4. If a person consumes 2oz. of hard liquor, it will take one hour for all traces of it to be gone from his/her system .	F	46	20	34	100%
5. The blood-alcohol level necessary to be charged with drunk driving in Maryland is 0.15%.	T	38	14	48	100%
6. Switching drinks will make you drunker than staying with the same kind of drink.	F	35	47	18	100%
7. Alcohol is absorbed into the system and digested the same way as food is.	F	28	56	16	100%
8. Drinks of liquor mixed with water will produce intoxication sooner than drinks mixed with a carbonated beverage.	F	33	28	39	100%
9. Alcohol has no nutritional value.	T	47	32	21	100%
10. In cold weather, drinking alcohol will increase your body temperature.	F	47	38	15	100%
11. A 12-oz. can of beer and one oz. of 100-proof whiskey contain the same amount of alcohol.	T	13	41	46	100%